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POLITICAL PREACHING :

OR THE

MEDITATIONS OF A WELL-MEANING MAN,

ON A

SERMON LATELY PUBLISHED;

IN A

LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

THE REV. MR. WILLIAM DUN,

MINISTER OF KIRKINTULLOCH.

GLASGOW:

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POLITICAL PREACHING, &c.

REVEREND SIR,

THERE is no species of composition which pleases me more, than a good sermon on any moral or religious subject. I read discourses of that kind, not in the expectation of meeting with any thing new, on topics which have been so often and so fully discussed, but in the hope of having my heart made better ; and when they happen to be written with perspicuity and spirit, I find them extremely useful in reminding me of my duty, and in rousing me to the proper discharge of it. In every discourse which bears the title of a sermon, I expect to find, either some doctrine of religion illustrated, and applied for the consolation of the Christian, or some duty of life explained, and enforced by suitable arguments. When this is not the case, I feel a grievous disappointment. I am not, however, one of those morose religionists, who take no concern in human affairs. Like others, I observe what is passing around me : I take an interest in

the subject of the day, and sometimes employ a leisure hour in reading one of those political pamphlets with which at present the world abounds.

But I have also my hours of meditation, which I devote to more serious employments; when I wish to place politics at a distance, and to feast my mind with the writings of those worthy men, who have devoted their time and their talents to promote the interests of piety and virtue.

These hours, Sir, I never willingly misemploy: But the blame is not mine, if a political pamphlet is palmed upon me, in the form of a sermon; and this is the very thing of which I am now to complain. In passing along the street last day, I saw in the window of a bookseller's shop, a number of new publications, displayed in so inviting a manner, that I was tempted to step in, and look at them. Among the rest, I was happy to observe a sermon of yours, having often heard you spoken of as a Clergyman of distinguished character; the text was a striking one---Revelations xxi. 5. "*And he that sat on the Throne said, Behold I make all things new.*" I was anxious to have the passage explained to me; and as I was just going home to spend an hour in serious meditation, I thought I had found a treasure in this discourse. Accordingly I purchased it of the bookseller, and carried it with me to my closet. Before I began to read it, however, I did what I usually do on such occasions, I opened my Bible and read the context. I saw, around the text, several passages with which I supposed it might be connected, and which I understood better than the text itself. I promised myself much consolation, for I imagined that the whole passage might refer to the happiness of a future state, of which the verse preceding the text seemed to contain a most delightful description.

tion. Full of this expectation, I began to peruse the sermon. As it was delivered at the opening of a Synod, I was not surprised that, in your introduction, you should be desirous to impress your Reverend Fathers and Brethren with a just idea of your learning, by endeavouring to account for the use of the present tense, in the expression, *Behold I make all things new*. I read, with due respect for your grammatical knowledge, the reason which you assign for this form of construction, viz. "*that duration with God is all one great permanent present, or punctum stans*;" and, without stopping to investigate very closely the idea expressed by these words, which I was afraid I should not easily comprehend, I hurried forwards to discover the doctrine contained in the text, which I found in the second page, stated in the following manner :

" *That the Father of Wisdom and of Truth, himself, hath, by his omnipotent hand, interwoven into the frame of human affairs an active energy, which by incessant successive exertions, is productive of a continual train of perfective alterations, not overthrowing or changing fundamental principles, but unfolding their tendency, and fulfilling the design of their appointment, and thereby continually exhibiting such modifications and regular mutations of things, as are, each as it occurs, well entitled to be called new.*"

I confess I was a little humbled, to find that the meaning of this passage was to be so extremely different, from that which I had hastily affixed to it ; and my humiliation was greatly increased, when, on reflection, I began to perceive, not only that I had misunderstood the meaning of the passage, but that I was not likely ever to understand it, seeing the very interpretation of it was more above my com-

comprehension, than the text itself, at first sight, appeared to be.

As I am a man of some perseverance, however, and not easily overcome by difficulties, I determined to make a vigorous effort in order to get at the truth. Having had a grammar school education in my youth (for my father intended me for better things, till unfortunately his circumstances failed), I availed myself of the little of my Latin which I still remembered ; I examined the words as they lay in their order, and passing such of them, as I thought might be spared, I began at last to perceive that the doctrine of the text was this, *That God hath interwoven in human affairs a principle of improvement.*

I now proceeded, hoping that no more difficulties would occur, and trusting that the useful instruction I should receive, would reward me for the trouble I had taken. I got at length to the end of the sermon. But alas! my hour for meditation had passed, and my heart was not made better. How, indeed, could it be made better? for I had been reading all this time *of the arts liberal and mechanical, of poets, painters, musicians, statuary---of the art of the husbandman, of the navigator, of the manufacturer, and the instruments they have employed---of the origin of the various Governments that have appeared on the earth, few, if any of which you tell me, have been constituted in a rational and deliberate manner---of secrets in manufactories, of monopolies in trade, and exclusive privileges in boroughs---of religious establishments, considered as unfavourable to the progress of improvement, and a variety of other subjects, equally foreign to the purpose for which I ever go to Church, and for which, at this time, I carried a sermon with me into my closet.*

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It is true, indeed, there is one part of the sermon, in which you devote a few sentences to trace the progress of religion, from the call of Abraham to the present time, and you do acknowledge in passing, that *the progress of Grace in the heart of the individual, is not less interesting than the progress of the Church at large*. In this remark I most cordially agree with you. I will even venture to say, that, to me at least, *the progress of Grace in the heart* is not less interesting, than the progress of *Arts and Governments*; and I could not help regretting, that the only subject in your sermon on which I wished to dwell, was dismissed as soon as mentioned. This is not the way in which our Fathers treated such subjects; but it seems there is a *progress of improvement* going on.

You introduce the same subject again, indeed, towards the end of the discourse, where you ask this important question, "*And hath not the progress of Grace in the heart of the individual much opposition to contend with?*" Yes, Sir, it hath. When I came to this passage, I was all attention, hoping that you would now explain to me the nature of this opposition, and point out the means of overcoming it, which I am sure you could have done much to my satisfaction and improvement. But after barely stating the fact, in two or three figurative expressions, and assuring us, in general terms, that Grace will prevail, you dismiss the subject again, I suppose because your time would not now permit you to discuss it at greater length. I am, truly sorry, Sir, that this should have been the case; especially, as in that part of your sermon on which you have chosen to enlarge, there are a variety of hints suggested, which, I think, might have been spared, and of which, at first sight, I could perceive the practical application.

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In the head on Government, for instance, you tell us, that “ *it is a provoking truth, that the people have never hitherto been able to gain anything to the side of public liberty, without recourse being had to open force, or to threatenings of it.*” In this, however, I suspect you are mistaken. In the Student’s Pocket Dictionary, a useful little book, I see, under the article Acts of Parliament, a great number of excellent laws for improving the public liberty, which were carried in the usual way through the two Houses of Parliament, and sanctioned by the King’s consent, without recourse being had to open force; and on the day of thanksgiving for the King’s recovery, I remember my heart was filled with the warmest gratitude to God, when we were told by our minister, a pious, peaceable, and learned man, that in the year 1761 an act was passed (of which our present Sovereign himself was a zealous promoter) for securing our liberties and properties against oppression, by rendering our judges independent on the Crown. Though I could neither suspect the information nor the veracity of our minister, yet, when I came home from church, I inquired into the fact, and I offered up a new thanksgiving to Heaven, when I found that it was exactly as he had stated it. This, Sir, was applying politics to the business of the day.

You remind us next of *that proud æra*, In the History of our Country, when *the useful bubble of opinion was broken, when things were reduced to their first principles, when the great body of the people were roused and agitated, and when those who should have yielded with a good grace, were compelled by force, or intimidated by fear, to comply with justice.* The great body of the people, you tell us in another place, are those *whose estate consists chiefly in their capacity of bodily labour, who thus carry the most valuable*

valuable part of what is theirs about with them, and who, therefore, would risk but little, were even the most dangerous crisis of the resisted spirit of improvement to occur. To what doth all this tend? Shall a Christian estimate his obligations to peace, only by the risk which he has to run, when the bands of Society are broken?

I, Sir, am one of the persons to whom this description applies. Though originally intended for a learned profession, I was obliged (by the cause I have already mentioned) to betake myself in very early life to another employment; my family (though, I thank God, I can maintain them in a very comfortable manner) depend entirely on my labour. I have no estate; I have no money in any of the banks; *I thus carry the most valuable part of what is mine about with me*, and, except my own life, and that of my wife and children, I have nothing to risk, *though the most dangerous crisis should occur.* But even this is not a little. My life is valuable to my family; their lives are valuable to me; and public peace is valuable to us all; that we may be permitted (as hath hitherto been the case), to sweeten one another's existence, while we eat our morsel together, in a dwelling protected by Law. We are not afraid to die, but we wish to die in our beds. If it shall be my lot to die first, let it not be by the hands of an assassin, but let me have my wife and my children around me, that I may give them my advice and my blessing, and then ask them to close my eyes.

I have no property of my own, Sir, to lose; but I will not, on that account, be the more ready to disturb the order of Society. I am sensible that I have many failings, but I trust I have the heart of a Christian; and my Bible tells me, that it is my duty "to do unto others as I wish that they should do unto me." I am far from envying the rich the

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property which their fathers have left them, or which their own industry hath procured. I respect the property of my neighbours, as much as I could my own; and I shall regret it as sincerely as the most prosperous of them all, if that crisis shall ever occur in which their property shall be exposed to danger. I am not rich, Mr. Dun; but I am neither a thief nor a robber.

Again, Sir, let me ask you, when did that proud æra occur, when *the bubble of opinion was broken, and when things were reduced to their first principles?* You speak of the time when the Great Charter of English Liberty was signed: But my Dictionary informs me, that this Charter was procured from King John, in consequence of a powerful association among the Barons. You speak of the period of the Revolution; but my Dictionary shews me clearly, that at the Revolution things were not reduced to their first principles. No, Sir, as far as my information reaches, this hath never been the case in any country on the face of the earth, except lately in the kingdom of France, where, within the space of four years, things have been *twice* reduced to their first principles. In this state they still continue, and how long they may remain in this situation, neither you nor I can form any conjecture. This, surely, is not that *renovation of all things* to which your text alludes.

On the 10th of August last, the great body of the people were roused and agitated. It was a *proud æra*. The condemnation of Fayette, the chief deliverer of his country, was a *proud æra*. The murder of Barnave, the orator of the people, was a *proud æra*. The beheading of Madam Lamballe, the formal presentment of her head to the Queen, the exposing her mangled body on the streets, was a *proud æra*. The massacre of the wretched prisoners and the defenceless priests, was a *proud æra*. The motion for arming twelve hundred assassins, and

and the silence of the National Assembly on the occasion, was a *proud era* : but such an *era* as this may my country never see!

No man rejoiced more sincerely than I did, at the opening of the French Revolution. It was a spectacle which must have delighted every benevolent heart, to see a society, consisting of four and twenty millions of men, about to be delivered from a most oppressive and tyrannical Government, without the effusion of blood. But who can help regretting, that by *reducing things to their first principles*, they should have lost the fairest opportunity that ever was presented to a nation, of rendering themselves free, and great, and happy. Still, however I wish them well, and long for the day, though it seems distant, when they shall recover from their present confusions. These confusions I consider as a warning, not an example to us ; for I cannot respect the justice of a Government, which hath suffered such crimes as those I have mentioned to pass unpunished, nor can I admire the mildness or the dignity of their Convention, however freely elected, when I see them dividing their attention equally between what is atrocious, and what is frivolous ; at one time sending forth an army to lay waste a kingdom, and, at another, ordering a new coat for Jean Baptiste.

Let me ask you once more, Sir, what kind of opinions are those, which you distinguish by the name of *useful bubbles*? In speaking on a subject like this, and particularly before a popular assembly, it is surely proper to be precise, lest the audience, misunderstanding the doctrine, should carry it farther in practice, than the preacher intends. This precaution is peculiarly necessary, at a time when so many new doctrines, with regard to religion and government are in circulation.

When you tell me, then, that there are opinions of the kind you mention, you ought certainly to

tell me also, what these opinions are. Many doctrines which our fathers held sacred, are now regarded as *bubbles*. Among the French, for example, religion of every kind seems to be considered as a *bubble*, to which they will hardly apply the epithet *useful*; and were you at present living in that Land of Freedom, I am not sure if it would be safe for you to pronounce the very words of your text, because it is introduced by this expression, *And he that sat on the Throne said*. In France the institution of the Sabbath is considered as a *bubble*; and when I read weekly in the newspapers of the meetings of the National Convention on that sacred day, which in every Christian country is set apart to commemorate our Saviour's Resurrection from the dead, I feel a religious horror rising within me---a horror which is much increased, when I consider the nature of the business in which they are generally engaged.

These last observations, however, have no inseparable connection with any thing that you have said. I believe you to be a man of strict piety and virtue, and I trust that nothing is farther from your intention, than to justify any of the doctrines to which I now allude. Indeed, to do you justice, you have not once mentioned the affairs of France. Your doctrine is altogether of the general kind. I only state these remarks, as a part of the train of thought, which was suggested to my mind by the perusal of your sermon; and I do so, not so much on your own account, as for the sake of some of your readers who might be led, inadvertently, to apply your general doctrine to cases which, I am sure, you could not have in your view.

I come now to the conclusion of your sermon, in which you address yourself more immediately to the great body of the people, among whom I take my place, that from you I may learn my duty as
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a Christian. I have your sermon in my hand just now, that I may read this passage a second time, for it seemed to contain something to my purpose.

You tell us, that *we are blest with the Religion of Christ, and heirs of the happiest civil constitution in Europe.* For these valuable blessings, it shall be my study to cherish, the warmest gratitude to Heaven. You exhort me, “*to love God, to honour the King, to venerate the Constitution, and to maintain the laws of my country,*” by which you mean, no doubt, that I should obey them. Now, I find that you and I are likely to be at one. These are excellent advices; I feel my obligation to comply with them.

What follows? Speaking of our laws and government, you say, “*Add what is wanting, regenerate what is decayed, correct what is amiss.*”

Here I am a little puzzled. I am sure I wish well to my country; but this, I am afraid, is not proper work for me. Before I can comply with your admonition, I must make it my study to know exactly *what is wanting, what is decayed, what is amiss?* To touch such a Constitution as ours, requires a very tender hand, for you told me, just now, that it is *the happiest constitution in Europe*, and I should never forgive myself, if by proceeding rashly or ignorantly, I should injure so glorious a fabric.

As this part of your sermon was addressed to such people as myself, who am far from being deeply skilled in the practice of politics, I really wish, Sir, that you had been more particular in telling us what our duty is. I find, that now-a-days, men differ exceedingly in their opinions with regard to what is amiss in our Government. Some people tell us, that it is all wrong together, owing to its *not having been constituted in a rational*

a rational and deliberate manner ; a sentiment very different, indeed, from that which you express at the top of this page. But for my part I can never agree with such people, for I feel myself as secure and happy, as it is possible for any Government to make me. My life is defended from violence ; the path of industry is as open to me as to the greatest man in the state ; the fruits of my industry are my own ; and no person, from the King on the throne to the meanest of the people, hath power to oppress or injure me. What more can any Government do for me ? I have taxes, indeed, to pay ; but I consider them as the price of my security, and I pay them without a grudge. Besides, they are imposed in so equitable a manner, that they fall on the various classes of the subjects, exactly in proportion to their wealth. I pay more of them, just now, than I did some years ago, because, from the increasing price of my labour, I can afford to enjoy more of those conveniencies of life on which the taxes are laid, than I could then do ; and he that has twice my income pays twice as much to the state.

I know that in every country, Government must be supported ; and there is no kind of work, which, I think, ought to be better paid for, than the work of those, who withdraw themselves from other employments, in order to devote themselves to the public service. In a flourishing country like ours, this is peculiarly necessary, and I confess I should not like to see, that (while every person around them was rich) the servants of the state alone were poor. *Bad payment, bad service*, is a maxim which every trader understands. I am far from pretending to justify any unnecessary expenditure of the public money ; but stations of public trust ought, surely, to be filled by men of distinguished abilities ; and in order to secure this, the profits of these stations ought to be such, that men

of abilities may aspire after them. The greater part of our taxes, however, arise not from the annual expences of Government, but from the public debt, in which the nation has been involved, by wars and other events, which, I trust in God, will seldom occur again : and this I consider as a debt of justice to those who have lent their money to the state ; as much *a debt of justice*, as any of the little sums which my employers owe to me.

That part of the taxes which goes to support the dignity of the Crown, I am far from regarding as misapplied. The gifts of freemen ought to be worthy of themselves ; and it is proper that our liberality should give a lesson to those arbitrary princes who impoverish their subjects by oppression, and convince them, that the Sovereign can then only be happy, when the public purse is in the power of the people. I confess, Sir, I feel a pride in being a subject of the British Government, and I think it is an honest pride. I am pleased to see our King surrounded with a degree of splendour, suited to the eminence of his station ; and I consider him as the greatest sovereign in Europe, because he is the Sovereign of a Nation of Freemen, who enjoy, under his reign, a degree of prosperity and happiness, unknown before, even in Britain.

I need only to look around me, in order to be convinced that this is the case. My neighbours are all flourishing and wealthy. The price of their labour has increased of late, much more than in proportion to the taxes. They are becoming richer every day, and it is impossible to say to what an extent our condition may be improved, if we will be persuaded to rest satisfied with our situation, to apply ourselves diligently to our different occupations, and to avail ourselves of the important advantages which at present we enjoy. These, Sir, are the reasons why I cannot agree with

with those who are dissatisfied with the Government under which we live. I judge of governments, not as they do in France, by any abstract notions of perfection, but by the effects which they actually produce; and from the effects which our Government has produced for more than an hundred years, you and I are justified, I think, in maintaining, that it is *the happiest civil Constitution in Europe*.

No human system, indeed, is absolutely free from imperfection; and you seem to insinuate, that our Government also has its defects. If it be a reform in the Parliamentary Representation, to which you exhort me to contribute, I have no objection, for my part, that this, or any other reform, should take place, when the wisdom of Parliament shall see it proper. In the mean time, however, as I suffer no oppression, or inconvenience from the present state of affairs, I will not easily be persuaded to neglect what I owe to my family, in order to promote the schemes. I confess I have suffered myself to be too much led away of late by the example of others. I have spent too much of my time in reading political pamphlets, and attending Societies for promoting Reform. I am determined to do so no longer. I see that the sentiments of my neighbours are extremely discordant on the subject, and I wish to live in peace with them all. If a Reform shall be brought about, it is well; I know it cannot make me a happier man than I am, and I hope it will do me no harm. *Our Legislators*, whose temper, you assure me, is so **equitable*, understand these matters much better than I do, and in them I shall continue to confide.

There is one word in this sentence, on which I beg leave to make a remark in passing. It is the word

word *regenerate*, which you here employ in a sense not very usual, I think, in the pulpit. I know that in France, where politics have swallowed up religion, the term *regeneration* is used to denote what you express more happily by *reducing things to their first principles*. But in this country it has generally been employed to denote a religious idea, and in this sense I always wish to see it used, when I meet with it in a sermon.

I come now to the last sentence of your sermon. I always listen with peculiar attention to a speaker's last words, because I am told in a little book on Logic which my father left me, "that it is an established rule in oratory, to reserve for the conclusion of the oration, the sentiment which the speaker is most anxious to impress on the minds of his hearers." Let us hearken, then, to your last advice---*Contribute your part to make all Europe sensible, that the profligate opinion is no longer to be received, that the people are made for the prince, and not the prince by and for the people, that nations are no longer to be sacrificed to the vanity of princes, and to the rapacity of those about them.*

Here, Sir, I am again at a loss. I wish to do my duty, but you have not told me how to discharge it. How shall I contribute to shew, that the people were not made *for* the prince?---Not surely by invading the prerogatives of our own King, whom you have exhorted me to *honour*; *who*, you say with truth, * *delights to be the Father of his People*, and whose prerogatives are already fixed and limited by law. Besides, to whom shall I shew this! The doctrine which you require me to refute, is, indeed, a most *profligate* one; but for more than an hundred years, it hath been publicly exploded in Britain; and I can see little good that

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is to be done, by going about to combat a doctrine which nobody maintains. Find me a man, however, who will assert that the people are made *for* the prince, and I shall comply with your advice, by telling that man to his face, that he maintains a most *profligate opinion*; and I am sure that our gracious Sovereign will think me a good subject for saying so.

Princes were made *for* the people; not, indeed, as is the case in France, to be treated with that injustice and cruelty, from which the laws of our happy land would protect the meanest criminal; but to be honoured and obeyed by those over whom they rule in wisdom, as the *ministers of God unto them for good*. This is my doctrine with regard to Government, which (if I may judge from some expressions scattered rarely throughout your sermon) accords exactly with your own. It has been well understood in this country since the glorious æra of the Revolution. Where then am I to preach it? You say, that I must *contribute my share to make all Europe sensible of it*. This is a hard saying. But by what authority shall I assume the title of an apostle for Europe? or why should I leave my family to set out on such an errand as this? Will it be sufficient for me to tell Europe, that I am sent by you? In what kingdom shall I begin my labours? Shall I go to France? There is no need for my services in France; the French have already shewn, that the people are the tyrants of kings. Shall I go to Spain or Portugal? You surely do not mean to consign a poor harmless man to the prison of the inquisition. Besides, I neither understand the languages of these countries, nor do my circumstances enable me to undertake so distant a mission.

The subjects which you introduce into your sermon sometimes make me forget, that it has for
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its motto a passage of Scripture. But though I can smile at an extravagant advice, I wish to be serious also on proper occasions: and now, Sir, I tell you in earnest, that I will not comply with your request.

I have other business to occupy my attention. I have a family, who are dear to me, to provide for; and being a man engaged in trade, I have it in my power to do more for them, at present, than in any former period of my life. The confusions which prevail in the Continent have interrupted the industry of some nations which formerly were rivals to us. How long this state of affairs may last, I know not; but, in the mean time, there is a greater demand for the different articles in our line than we are able to answer. This is a harvest to me, which I am determined to improve. Europe is too large a sphere for any exertions which I can make; Glasgow is wide enough for me. I am extremely doubtful whether my country would be benefited by my taking part in those political factions which at present prevail; but I am sure that my family will be much the better for my industry in my own employment; and if, amidst the labours which I devote to them, I reserve a due portion of my time, for discharging my duty to my God and my brethren around me, I shall then have the satisfaction to think that I am acting as it becomes a Christian.

It has ever been my rule, Sir, to consult my Bible, more than the works of men; and I will endeavour, to the utmost of my power, to live as it directs. Yes, Mr. Dun, I will live as my Bible directs me; “ *I will study to be quiet, and to do my own business; I will not exercise myself in great matters, or in things that are too high for me.*” I will imitate the virtues of my master, “ *who was meek and lowly in heart, who did not strive, nor lift up,*

" *nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.*" In compliance with the admonition of the Apostle, I will "*render unto all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour ;*" and whatever others do, I will not cease to "*offer up continually, supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men, for Kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty, for these things,*" the Scriptures assure me, "*are good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.*"

These, Sir, are my fixed resolutions ; and while I follow such high authorities, I have no fear of being misled. This, I am persuaded, is the very conduct, which, in the ordinary train of your discourses, you exhort your hearers to pursue. My reason for addressing you at present, is, *in the first place*, to prevent your doctrine (which, I must say, you have sometimes expressed in language that is rather unguarded) from being applied by a careless reader to purposes which you could not mean it to serve ; and, *in the second place*, to express my regret, that you should have suffered yourself, even for once, to be seduced from that line of useful preaching, in which I hear you excel, into the thorny path of politics.

You know your duty too well, for me to offer you an advice ; but you will not surely be offended, though I should venture to address to yourself those excellent admonitions, which you offer to your Fathers and Brethren---admonitions which, in my opinion, are worth all the rest of your sermon : "*Ever inculcate the divinity of Christ, the importance of his mediatory office, and the necessity of faith in him, in order to justification before God. Ever affirm, that they who have believed, must have the spirit of Christ in them, and be formed, in the temper*"

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“ of their mind, on his example ; press a filial obedience to his precepts, and the maintaining of a character, marked with that purity, piety, and righteousness which becomes the Gospel of Jesus.”

Preach on these subjects, Sir, and print every sermon which you preach. I will purchase them with the little that I can spare, and read them with delight.

I am far, Sir, from grudging you that unusual mark of approbation which you received from your Parishioners on account of this sermon, in an advertisement which I read, some time ago, in a newspaper. Long may you enjoy their esteem and affection. I only regret, that they should have delayed so long to give this public testimony in your favour; for I am persuaded, from what I have heard, that not a Sabbath hath passed since your settlement among them, on which you have not delivered to them instructions, much more calculated to promote their spiritual improvement, and consequently much more worthy of their gratitude, than those which this sermon contains.

You will wish, perhaps, to know how I think this sermon should be disposed of. I am far from considering it in the light of a seditious publication; on the contrary, in one or two places you express a very becoming respect for our King, for our Legislators, and for our Constitution. I imagine its chief aim is to promote a Reform in our Parliamentary Representation; at least (if I may judge from the advertisement formerly mentioned) your parishioners, who should understand your meaning, seem to have considered it in this view. On this subject, Sir, you are certainly entitled to hold your own opinion, and I have no desire that it should be suppressed. But your text will afford good ground for a discourse on another plan, more suited, perhaps, to the pulpit---and what I would advise is this :

Throw your sermon into the form of a pamphlet; express yourself a little more precisely with respect to the object which you have in view. Let some of the passages which I have mentioned, be guarded in such a manner, that they may neither be misunderstood by the careless, nor perverted by the designing, to purposes which you mean not to serve; and, if you wish that the pamphlet should have a motto, you will easily find one in some of the heathen poets, with which you must be better acquainted than I can be expected to be. My education in the Latin language proceeded no further than to enable me to read Ovid, which I could once do with tolerable ease. I still remember a few lines of the *Metamorphosis*, which my master made me get by heart; and I think I can suggest a passage which will suit your subject pretty well. It is the very first line of the first book of the *Metamorphosis*---

In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas
Corpora—

By *corpora* you can easily shew, that the Poet means bodies *politic*; and *formas* will correspond admirably to the character you give of all the governments that have hitherto appeared in the world, *few, if any of which, you say, have been constituted in a deliberate and rational manner*, and which, therefore, may be considered, as mere *bubbles, phantoms, or forms*, playing before the fancies of men.

Indeed, the whole first section of this Book, which relates to the creation, might afford a happy illustration of the doctrine of *reducing things to their first principles*; for as the world arose out of chaos, so it might easily be shewn, that the true system of social order can arise only out of anarchy and confusion. Though I am far from approving

proving of such doctrine, I have no objection that political essays should be founded on such passages as these ; but I do most sincerely wish to see politics banished from the pulpit. Political sermons are attended with many bad effects. They lead almost unavoidably to the perversion of the sacred scriptures ; they degrade the dignity of religion, by connecting it with the faction of the day, and turn the attention of the people, from subjects which might improve their hearts, to subjects which can serve only to inflame their passions ; to me, at least, it appears that the little portion of time which the lower classes of men can spare, from their necessary labour, and their necessary rest, would be much better employed in communing with their own hearts, and consulting the word of God, which would form them to contentment and peace, than in debating on political subjects, or poring over political treatises, many of which serve only to beget in them a groundless dissatisfaction with their condition, and to prepare them for "*every evil work*." We have seen in France that politics have banished every form of religion, and that the *frantic songs* of what is termed Liberty, have been substituted for the *Praises of God*. God forbid ! that this should ever be the case in our land. The inhabitants of Great Britain have hitherto been distinguished among the nations, as a religious people. I trust that this will ever be their character. Their little libraries are filled, as yet, with books of piety and devotion, with the writings of Watts and Henry, and other worthy men. But, I confess, I have been alarmed, of late, to see some of them purchasing with such avidity, the political pamphlets which are circulated, I think, with too much zeal ; and I was shocked the other day, when one of my neighbours informed me, that he had sold that valuable treatise

" The

“ The Life of God in the Soul of Man,” in order to purchase the works of Paine.

What shall the end of these things be !

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your well-wisher, and humble servant,

ADAM WHYTE.

POSTSCRIPT.

Before I sent this letter to the Printer, I shewed it to my worthy neighbour the Schoolmaster, that he might correct and polish the style. I was happy to find, that in general he approved of what I had written. He regretted, however, that in considering one part of your sermon, I had not given a list of some very important laws that have been passed, for improving our public liberty, *without recourse being had to open force, or to threatenings of it.*

He offered me his assistance in making up such a list, of which I gladly accepted ; and by the help of my *Pocket Dictionary*, and his memory, which is a good one, I now present you with the following catalogue of Acts of Parliament :

An Act for vacating the Seat of every Member of Parliament who shall accept of a Place, and sending him back to his Constituents.

An Act for limiting the Sum which the King is allowed to give in Pensions.

The abolishing a great number of offices, which were considered as unnecessary, *viz.* the Board of Green Cloth, the Lords of Trade, the Lords of Police in Scotland, &c.

The prohibiting Contractors to sit in Parliament.

The depriving all Officers of the Customs or Excise, of the Power of voting at Elections.

The Act lately passed for extending the Power of Juries in Trials for Libels.

There are a variety of other important laws which have been passed from time to time since the Revolution ; but these are sufficient to shew, that our Parliament is far from being inattentive to the interests of the people, and that those persons are mistaken, who say, “ *that the people have never hitherto been able to gain any thing to the side of public liberty, without recourse being had to open force, or to threatenings of it.*”

A. W.

